

MARGARET MARCUS, EX-JEW, USA (PART 4 OF 5)

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Description: Margaret continues to discuss how the Quran had impacted her life, and her views about Jews and Arab relations.

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Although I did find the Hereafter mentioned in the New Testament, compared with that of the Holy Quran, it is vague and ambiguous. I found no answer to the question of death in Orthodox Judaism, for the Talmud preaches that even the worst life is better than death. My parents' philosophy was that one must avoid contemplating the thought of death and just enjoy, as best one can, the pleasures life has to offer at the moment. According to them, the purpose of life is enjoyment and pleasure achieved through self-expression of one's talents, the love of family, the congenial company of friends combined with the comfortable living and indulgence in the variety of amusements that affluent America makes available in such abundance. They deliberately cultivated this superficial approach to life as if it were the guarantee for their continued happiness and good-fortune. Through bitter experience I discovered that self-indulgence leads only to misery, and that nothing great or even worthwhile is ever accomplished without struggle through adversity and self-sacrifice. From my earliest childhood, I have always wanted to accomplish important and significant things. Above all else, before my death, I wanted the assurance that I have not wasted life in sinful deeds or worthless pursuits. All my life I have been intensely serious-minded. I have always detested the frivolity which is the dominant characteristic of contemporary culture. My father once disturbed me with his unsettling conviction that there is nothing of permanent value because everything in this modern age accept the present trends inevitable and adjust ourselves to them. I, however, was thirsty to attain something that would endure forever. It was from the Holy Quran where I learned that this aspiration was possible. No good deed for the sake of seeking the pleasure of God is ever wasted or lost. Even if the person concerned never achieves any worldly recognition, his reward is certain in the Hereafter. Conversely, the Quran tells us that those who are guided by no moral considerations other than expediency or social conformity, and crave the freedom to do as they please, no matter how much worldly success and prosperity they attain or how keenly they are able to relish the short span of their earthly life, they will be doomed as the losers on Judgment Day. Islam teaches us that in order to devote our exclusive attention to fulfilling our duties to God and to our fellow-beings, we must abandon all vain and useless activities which distract us from this end. These teachings of the Holy Quran, made even more explicit by Hadith, were thoroughly compatible with my temperament.

Q: What is your opinion of the Arabs after you became a Muslim?

A: As the years passed, the realization gradually dawned upon me that it was not the Arabs who made Islam great but rather Islam had made the Arabs great. Were it not for the Holy Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, the Arabs would be an obscure people today. And were it not for the Holy Quran, the Arabic language would be equally insignificant, if not extinct.

Q: Did you see any similarities between Judaism and Islam?

A: The kinship between Judaism and Islam is even stronger than Islam and Christianity. Both Judaism and Islam share in common the same uncompromising monotheism, the crucial importance of strict obedience to Divine Law as proof of our submission to and love of the Creator, the rejection of the priesthood, celibacy and monasticism and the striking similarity of the Hebrew and Arabic language.

In Judaism, religion is so confused with nationalism, one can scarcely distinguish between the two. The name "Judaism" is derived from Judah - a tribe. A Jew is a member of the tribe of Judah. Even the name of this religion connotes no universal spiritual message. A Jew is not a Jew by virtue of his belief in the unity of God, but merely because he happened to be born of Jewish parentage. Should he become an outspoken atheist, he is no less "Jewish" in the eyes of his fellow Jews.

Such a thorough corruption with nationalism has spiritually impoverished this religion in all its aspects. God is not the God of all mankind, but the God of Israel. The scriptures are not God's revelation to the entire human race, but primarily a Jewish history book. David and Solomon (may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him) are not full-fledged prophets of God but merely Jewish kings. With the single exception of Yom Kippur (the Jewish Day of Atonement), the holidays and festivals celebrated by Jews, such as Hanukkah, Purim and Pesach, are of far greater national than religious significance.

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